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SUBJECT: OUTREACH TO WOMEN LEADERS IN FRANCE

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUBJECT: Ambassador Tahir-Kheli conducts outreach to women leaders in France about women's empowerment and integration

Summary

¶1. October 10-12, Senior Adviser to the Secretary of State for Women's Empowerment Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli conducted outreach to women leaders at the Deauville Women's Economic Forum and in Paris, reaching audiences from leaders in French politics to women social workers in underserved areas of Paris. She appeared widely in the French press including on France-24 television that potentially reaches 8 million viewers, amplifying her message about the unique and positive role women leaders are playing today on the toughest issues including human rights, through such networks as the Secretary of State's Women Leaders Group.

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Deauville Women's Forum, Empowering Women Par Excellence

¶2. At the Deauville Women's Forum known as the Davos for women, Ambassador Tahir Kheli spoke for an audience of about two hundred women business and political leaders from around the world and responded to questions on a panel about building trust in political institutions. The panel included Elisabeth Guigou, Member of the French National Assembly and Former Minister of Justice, and moderator Christine Ockrent, respected journalist (and long-time partner of France's Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner). She met also with Anne Lauvergeon, Chairman of the Executive Board of Areva, and with Laura Liswood, Senior Advisor at Goldman Sachs and Secretary General (SYG) of the Council of Women Leaders, USA, and

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organized follow-on meetings with both in Washington.

Reaching out to French Minority Audiences

¶3. On October 10 and 12, Ambassador Tahir-Kheli spoke with individuals and groups active in trying to build tolerance as well as opportunity in the troubled, somewhat isolated and diverse suburbs of Paris. She met with a team of about 15 women social workers as well as the mayor of the Paris suburb Bondy, both listening to their worries about possible continued unrest if more economic opportunity is not made available, and at the same time offering a positive role model as a successful American woman ambassador who is also Muslim. Ambassador Tahir-Kheli also met with

the young French Jewish author Olivia Cattan, President and Founder of Paroles de Femmes," an advocacy group involving both Muslim and Jewish women who are trying to improve the communication and atmosphere for minority women who interact with public institutions such as schools and hospitals. This group will speak at the French National Assembly on October 25. She visited on site as well officials of "Ni Putes Ni Soumises," a well-known French NGO working in support of women in such areas as protection against battering. The former president of this organization, Fadela Amara, is Secretary of State for Housing in President Sarkozy's government.

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Finally, Ambassador Tahir-Kheli addressed minority students from French universities who have traveled on scholarship for one-year study programs in the U.S. during a breakfast hosted by Mrs. Stapleton at the Chief of Mission Residence.

Invitation for State Secretary for Human Rights Rama Yade

14. Ambassador Tahir-Kheli met with State Secretary for Human Rights Rama Yade at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 12 and extended an invitation for her to actively participate in the work of the Secretary of State's Women's Leader Group that currently includes 26 foreign ministers and 5 heads of state. State Secretary Rama Yade welcomed the invitation enthusiastically, pointing out that she would confirm the appointment with the Foreign Minister. She would then participate in the next meeting of the Secretary's group in Greece. Also on her way to speak in Deauville at the women's forum, State Secretary Yade emphasized that the forum is not only international, but also an important meeting place for French women leaders. She also mentioned her recent lobbying at the UN for more women to join in political negotiations in war zones, and for female peacekeeping forces that are reportedly less frightening for women in refugee areas. Ambassador Tahir-Kheli supported this idea, citing the successful example of India's all-female unit for Liberia. Finally, the State Secretary raised the topic of women refugees in Western countries including high profile women such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali who could be harmed as soon as the spotlight is not on them. She recommended that networks be established to assist such vulnerable women. In closing, the State Secretary noted that she hopes to accompany President Sarkozy to the U.S. during his November visit.

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Media Interest in Ambassador Tahir-Kheli's Message

15. Ambassador Tahir-Kheli offered several media interviews during her visit. At the Women's Forum in Deauville, 24-hour news channel France-24 (potentially 8 million viewers worldwide) interviewed her about her participation in the panel on "What should women expect from political leaders to restore the trust in our governance systems?" She also briefly joined Melanne Vermeer for a press conference with the NGO Vital Voices about U.S. women's engagement with women of the developing world. In Paris, she had two interviews with editors-in-chief from African Magazines: Amina (circ. 55,350), the magazine of African women and Afrique Magazine (circ. 35,000), a pan-African international magazine directed to the 25-45 year old audience. With them, she discussed her visit to France, her background and the objectives of the U.S. for women's empowerment, especially in Africa. She also did a TV talk show interview on all-news channel France 24 about the Women's Forum and women's power, which was aired both in French and in English. In addition, a French reporter plans to interview Ambassador Tahir-Kheli during an upcoming visit to U.S. for a documentary entitled "100 Muslim Women's Voices." The documentary is expected to come out in movie theatres and to be used in museum exhibitions.

Conclusion

¶7. Ambassador Tahir-Kheli projected several important messages to audiences ranging from France's top leaders to the residents of the sensitive suburbs of Paris, and these messages were effectively amplified by the press. For Muslim audiences in France, her presence here proved to be moving, as she offers a very positive role model as an active and respected U.S. Ambassador who is also both female and Muslim. She spoke with clarity and wisdom about the unique role and responsibilities of women at the highest levels of government, and presented the positive initiatives of the Secretary of State in promoting and networking women leaders on key issues ranging from the human rights plight in Burma to transparency in government. Her visit to France was hence most productive and appreciated. The Deauville Women's Forum continues to offer a stellar opportunity for networking among women leaders from around the world, and we look forward to high level participation from the U.S. Government once again in next year's forum scheduled for October 16-18, 2008.

Stapleton